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South Viet Nam Has the Elements For a Bad Pre-Election Crisis

CPYRGHT

South Viet Nam may become the stickiest issue of the presidential campaign.

America is there as a part of the network of alliances forged by the late Secretary of State John Foster Dulles. South Viet Nam represents the "last line" of defense in Southeast Asia, it having been moved back from Laos.

South Viet Nam is only a pimple on the face of Asia. This is the place where we are challenged to honor treaty obligations. This is the place where Red China may be trying to pressure her way into the United Nations, a long-sought goal. This could be the place where the seriousness of the split between Peking and Moscow can be judged.

President Johnson has demonstrated a readiness to make our presence a matter of top importance with the air strike in the Gulf of Tonkin. But inside South Viet Nam, political-religious strife prevents encouraging

progress on the job at hand: Defense of the land.

Senator Goldwater, in another confused statement, said he thought "that talks with the Red Chinese might be profitable." Later, after talking with his press aide, he relayed the thought that what he really meant was that we should get into stronger military position in the area then "blow up a bridge or something" and inform Peking what we will do "if they don't stop." He said that is what he meant by "negotiation."

A CIA working paper, suggesting neutralization of the area, agrees with President Charles de Gaulle of France. De Gaulle flatly says American policy in the area is wrong.

The De Gaulle view hangs up on a bafflement. The French view is that Laos needs to be left alone; that "foreign interference can only retard the hour of solution and peace." The French don't explain how to do this while North Viet Nam is using the country as a "neutral" corridor to supply guerrillas in South Viet Nam.

The only way to neutralize South Viet Nam is to neutralize all the old French Indo-China and that trick depends upon Red China's willingness to stop dabbling there.

The area could be a pre-election crisis, anybody could profit from it.